DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 435 994 CS 216 930

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TITLE The Controlled Vocabulary--A Reexamination.
PUB DATE 1999-11-08
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basal Reading; Elementary Education; Phonics; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Skills; *Verbal Development; *Vocabulary Development; Whole Language Approach; *Word Recognition
IDENTIFIERS Reading Groups; Reading Management

ABSTRACT

The controlled vocabulary method of reading instruction (popular in the 1950's and 60's in the Dick and Jane basic reading series) had many inherent and numerous strong points. As with all beginning reading instruction methods, including the Big Book, heterogeneous reading group, holism, phonics, library book, and constructivist methods, controlled vocabulary involved controls, in the form of special vocabulary. The method also had many advantages: high word recognition, new vocabulary development, advancement of speaking vocabulary, supplementation by library books, and homogeneous reading groups. The emphasis was on success and achievement in reading skills. The controlled vocabulary philosophy may return in some form, in the manner that all reading methods cycle into and out of favor. (EF)

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by Marlow Ediger

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THE CONTROLLED VOCABULARY - A REEXAMINATION

There has been much criticism of the controlled vocabulary philosophy of the 1950s and 1960s in the Dick and Jane basic reading series. Beliefs in reading instruction change and thus the following are in vogue:

1. Using the Big Book and rereading approaches.
2. Using heterogeneous grouping rather than homogeneous approaches.
3. Using holism rather than phonics methods of reading instructions.
4. Using library books and minimizing basal reader use.
5. Using constructivism in teaching reading instead of direct teaching of helping pupils learn to read.

For each of the above five enumerated trends there is an opposite and equal reaction, such as one of three laws of motion in physics. Thus, there are disadvantages as well as advantages for each approach. Previous methods of reading instruction do come back to the forefront such as non-graded procedures of teaching reading. Will the controlled vocabulary of reading instruction come back again in whole or just in part?

The Controlled Vocabulary

In beginning reading instruction, there are always controls. Why? Each pupil basically has a more advanced speaking/oral communication vocabulary, as compared to the vocabulary used in learning to read. The Big Book philosophy has

its controls in the teacher modeling what pupils are to read and rereading, as often as necessary with pupil involvement. With rereading, holism is involved and pupils are to develop a basic sight vocabulary. The teacher, of course, controls what is read.

Heterogeneous or mixed achievement levels of pupils in a class has its controls with involved peer teaching and collaborative learning.

Holism has its controls, including library book rather than textbook use, in that pupils may discover, with teacher guidance, words that begin or end with the same sound. Or, words that possess the same medial sound may be in evidence. With library books, pupils select from among alternatives which books to read sequentially. Which library books are available for pupil reading have been chosen by the teacher.

Constructivism has its controls with pupil appraisal in context, and not through externally developed standardized or criterion referenced tests. Pupils and the teacher monitor the former's progress.

So does the controlled vocabulary have its controls as the name indicates. Very frequently, educational literature criticizes the following in controlled vocabulary, provided as an example:

> Look, look, John, look.
> Come, come, come, and see.

In the above example, pupils meet up with the words "look" and "come," supposedly as new words. These new words are repeated and are to become a part of the pupil's established sight vocabulary. The controlled vocabulary played the same role as rereading does with the Big Book approach.

There were definite advantages in using a controlled vocabulary philosophy of reading instruction. Among others, the following are advantages:

1. Pupils gain security in word recognition by limiting the number of new words to be mastered.

2. Pupils gradually add new words to their stock of a sight vocabulary which are words recalled immediately upon sight.

3. Pupils speaking vocabulary will be more advanced as compared to the reading vocabulary. A plan of instruction needs to be in evidence to minimize the gap. The controlled vocabulary is one method.

4. Pupils may read library books of their very own choosing to provide for individual levels of reading achievement. The library books supplement the controlled vocabulary basals.

5. Pupils may achieve more rapidly if placed in homogeneous groups for reading instruction. Controlled vocabulary basals may provide for optimal achievement then for slow, average, and fast achievers.

Many times, the success of any plan of reading instruction depends upon how it is implemented. Thus, the teacher may have each pupil master a controlled vocabulary basal and have the learner move on to the next more complex reader. In this way, a pupil may achieve rapidly in reading achievement and still be a successful reader. Success in reading is a key ingredient here. Pupil encouragement

to select and read library books might well become a part of a quality reading program. Reading library books can be a significant facet of any program of reading instruction. Never is a basal or any other method of reading instruction the sole determiner of assisting pupils in learning to read.

Why Did The Controlled Vocabulary Come In Disfavor?

Rarely, does any program of reading instruction have a solid backing of reading professionals. Perhaps, this is to the good of reading instruction advocates. Why? The teaching of reading never has been or will be a science. Any procedure needs to be adapted to what will assist the individual pupil to do well. The old slogan, "Pupils are different in many ways including abilities, interests, purposes, and styles of learning," still and will continue to prevail. A pupil is not like a standardized automobile part where one size fits all for that particular car model.

In Conclusion

Plans of reading instruction may come and go. The controlled vocabulary had many inherent and numerous strong talking points. Reading instruction does and continues to evolve. Even the whole language versus phonics debate takes on a new dimension in successive years. There will be some kind of holism as well as some type of phonics instruction. How much of each and which kind of materials to use will vary. The controlled vocabulary lives on, too, with newer approaches in reading instruction with their unique controls in helping pupils learn to read. I have

spoken to many people who experienced the Dick and Jane stories and their controlled vocabulary. Many of these people became good readers and successful university instructors in the teaching of reading. There seemingly are many variables in teaching pupils and one of these is the approach used in reading instruction in the elementary school.